UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

DD 000 010 279 8

.ID

.yron

4381
43

BYRON.

ADDRESS

AT

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, NOTTINGHAM,

ON

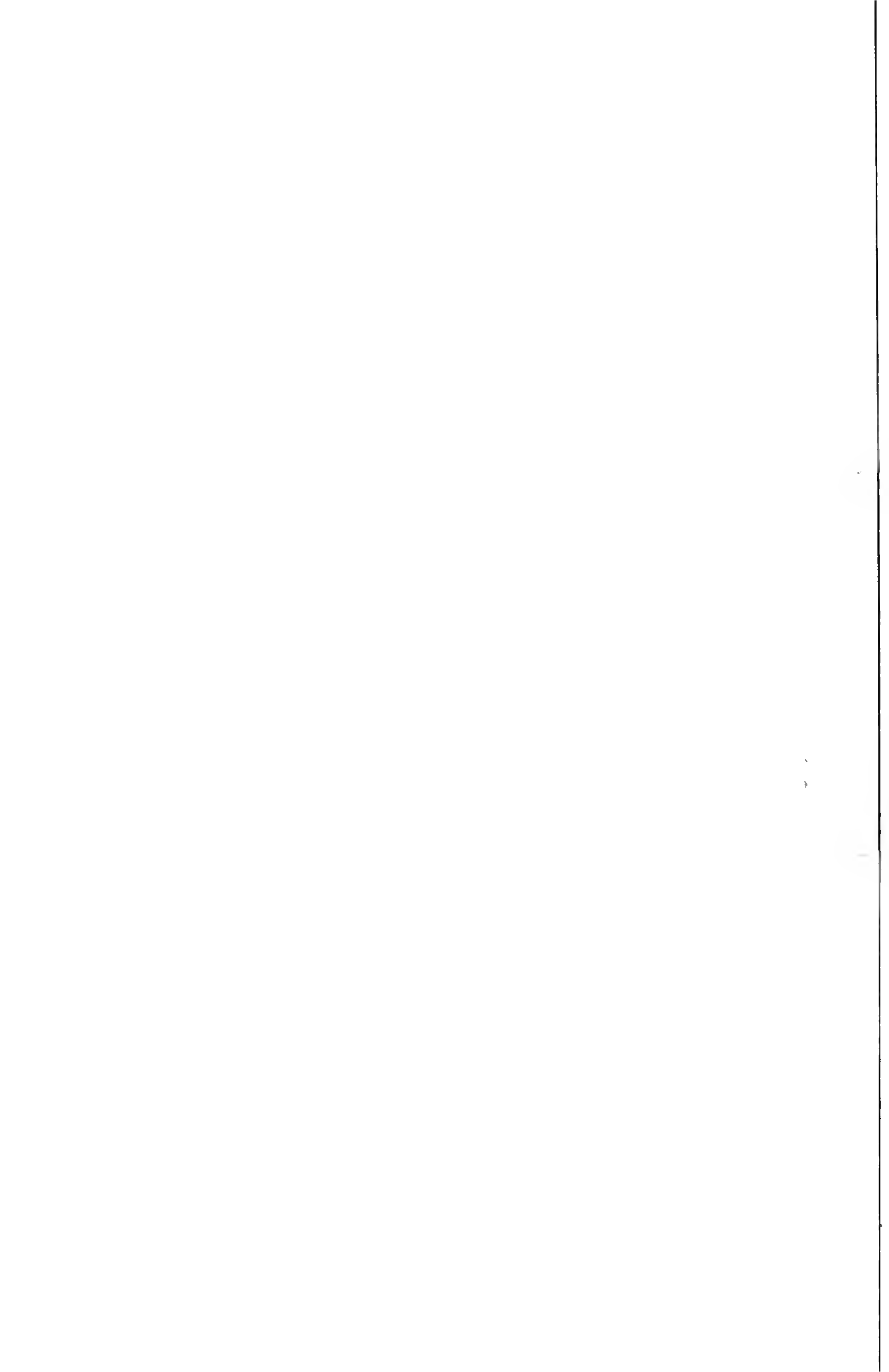
SPEECH DAY, 29th NOVEMBER, 1910,

FOR THE

BYRON CHAIR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

BY

WHITELAW REID.



With Mr. Reid's Compliments.

BYRON.

ADDRESS

AT

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, NOTTINGHAM,

ON

SPEECH DAY, 29th NOVEMBER, 1910,

FOR THE

BYRON CHAIR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

BY

WHITELAW REID.

HARRISON AND SONS, PRINTERS
LONDON, 1910.

To the Honourable Whitelaw Reid
American Ambassador to the Court of St James

We the undersigned being interested in the well being of University Education in the City of Nottingham whose University College was the first institution in this Country established by the municipality which for over 30 years has devoted large sums annually from the profits of the trading concerns of the City to its maintenance, venture very respectfully to approach your Excellency and to request you to honour our University College by your presence at a "Speech Day" to be held on some date convenient to your Excellency

We are of opinion that the time has come for a forward movement in connection with our College, and one of the first desirable steps is the founding of a Chair of English Literature which shall bear the name of that great Nottingham man Lord Byron. of whom no monument exists amongst us, and whose Poetry we believe is greatly esteemed in the United States of America

It is a fit time that some such tribute of remembrance should be paid to him. Nearly a hundred years have passed since in obedience to the call of Greece, Byron gave his life in her service and died at Missolonghi. With the help of your Excellency we hope to bring home to the City and the neighbourhood of Nottingham the worth of Lord Byron's memory and his eminence as a Poet. We

are conscious of the greatness of the favour which we are requesting at your Excellency's hands; but we hope that you will be willing to devote to the estimate of Lord Byron's character and achievement that delicacy of discrimination and that felicity of expression which Englishmen have learnt to appreciate and admire in your Excellency.

Dated this twenty sixth day of March 1910

Portland — Lord Lieutenant

Albert Ball — Mayor

Thomas Ward — Sheriff

Joseph Wright — Vice President & Chairman of Council

Chas Foulds — Vice Chairman of Council

E. Laurence Manning
W. E. Morris
J. E. Hewson
A Clarke
John Pycroft
[illegible] Wright
— Members of Council of University College

J. E. Symes M.A. Principal U.C.N.

William H Heaton M.A Vice Principal

F. Stanley Kipping Ph.D., D.Sc., F.R.S. Professor of Chemistry

Edwin H. Barton, D.Sc., F.R.S.E., Professor of Experimental Physics

Amos Henderson B.A. Professor of Education

J. W. Carr, M.A. Professor of Biology

Arthur Morley M.Sc. Professor of Mechanical Engineering

Frank Granger D.Lit., M.A., Professor of Classics

J. A. H. Green Vice-President & Hon: Sec: University College

BYRON.

University College, Nottingham, Speech Day:

For the Byron Chair of English Literature.

It is proposed, I am told, to inaugurate in your University College of Nottingham a new Chair of English Literature. Accordingly there has been a question as to selecting some great literary light of England under whose name this Chair might auspiciously begin its work.

But why should there be any question? How can there be any selection? For an institution grown up almost in the shadow of Newstead Abbey, is not the selection already and automatically made? Your own son, born of a family identified with the County for generations, himself perhaps the greatest poet of the Nineteenth Century, certainly its most celebrated Englishman—how can you

go afield in your search while at your very door rise the name and world-wide fame of Byron?

There are reservations to be made, no doubt. They may seem to strike a jarring note on this occasion, and before an audience which possibly includes descendants of those very people of Nottingham on whose behalf your great poet made his first chivalric appeal in the House of Lords to the British sense of justice and mercy. If so, may I plead in apology that only on the assurance that such reservations would not be found objectionable could I overcome my own hesitation to undertake this honourable duty. I must begin then, even here, with the reluctant admission that no good instructor of youth will put before them the character of Lord Byron to be emulated, or the general tendency of much of his poetry to be admired. On the other hand, no competent instructor of youth can put before them any estimate of the English literature of the Nineteenth

Century, in which Byron does not bulk a large figure, if not the largest.

Nor are the fluctuations of the public estimate and of the public taste to be forgotten. There was a time when no English poet was so popular and so universally read, either in England or on the Continent. To borrow his own graphic phrase, he awoke one morning and found himself famous. Then there came a time when no English poet was so odious. The disapproval aroused by his acts, his utterances, and what the world thought it knew of his character, extended to his work. Men still read it, but often only to dwell on the baleful brilliancy of the light that had gone astray. The burst of amused contempt in which Jeffrey (or Brougham for him) had torn to pieces the callow poet-peer and his "Hours of Idleness," seemed but a summer zephyr compared with the storm which later beat upon this sudden favourite, after he had triumphed in "Childe Harold" only to sink to the miasms of "Don Juan," "The Waltz," and

their like. Other and nobler work appeared, which compelled the world again to readjust its estimate. At last, too soon, too sadly, in exile, came Missolonghi, and the end. Once more the pendulum of public approval swung to and fro. When it finally settled—not very far from a just medium—the century had passed its meridian, new tastes had developed, new men arisen, and Byron was already relegated to the shelf of authors who *had* been favourites—to the shelf where we now range Scott and Wordsworth and Coleridge, with their elders, Pope, Goldsmith, Addison, and yet greater names—men to be still read on occasion, but no longer an intimate, essential part of the active literary life of the time.

We need not shut our eyes to the fact that these changes were partly due to a frequent instinct of the public to weigh the worth of Lord Byron's verse by the worthlessness of his life. This last he himself persisted in forcing upon the attention of the public, and he seemed to take an impish, if not insane, delight in making the worst of

it. His habitual pose was worse than his real wickedness. We may as well admit that his conduct was full of faults, and that there was no very long period in his life when any decent society could have regarded him as a desirable member. But he was never as bad as he painted himself; there were always people of refinement who clung to him; and against his admitted delinquencies it is only charitable to remember his lamentable heredity, physical misfortune, tortured nerves, precocious and phenomenally vehement affections, uncontrollable passions, exaggerated pride, as well as his loneliness and his utter lack of early guidance. With these admissions, and these offsets, it is as wise to close that chapter. The flood of biographical speculation as to just how bad he really was, is not profitable; and we may utterly ignore the gross stories retailed by women, who knew enough to be in better business, which first soiled the light a third of a century ago in an American magazine that was then thought an expression of the country's culture.

It puts a pleasanter taste in the mouth to be reminded, as you may be by Professor Granger of your College, that he is affectionately remembered here in his own County among the descendants of his boyish love, Mary Chaworth, even to the third and fourth generation; and to recall for yourselves that he had the early recognition and held to the end the kindly regard of that sweetest and bravest soul in British literature, Sir Walter Scott, as well as the affection of Thomas Moore and Percy Bysshe Shelley, and the lofty eulogium of Goethe himself.

An American, too, may be permitted a tenderer feeling towards the dethroned literary monarch than is quite customary now in the land of his birth. We do not forget his sympathy with our struggle for the rights of Englishmen, or his quick recognition of our foremost man. I need hardly remind you of Childe Harold's despairing question:

> Can Freedom find no champion and no child
> Such as Columbia saw arise when she
> Sprung forth a Pallas, armed and undefiled?
> Or must such minds be nourished in the wild,

Deep in the unpruned forest, midst the roar
Of cataracts, where nursing Nature smiled
On infant Washington? Has Earth no more
Such seeds within her breast, or Europe no such shore?

And, again, you will recall the closing stanza of his "Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte":

Where may the wearied eye repose
  When gazing on the Great;
Where neither guilty glory glows,
  Nor despicable state?
Yes—one—the first—the last—the best—
The Cincinnatus of the West,
  Whom envy dared not hate,
Bequeathed the name of Washington
To make men blush there was but one!

And still again:

A higher title, or a loftier station,
  Though they may make Corruption gape and stare,
Yet, in the end, except in Freedom's battles,
Are nothing but a child of Murder's rattles.
And such they are—and such they will be found:
  Not so Leonidas and Washington,
Whose every battle-field is holy ground,
  Which breathes of nations saved, not worlds undone.

And, to select only one more example, when his Greek enterprise was taking shape in his teeming brain, it led to this significant entry in his Journal:

"To be the first man (*not* the Dictator), not the Sylla, but the Washington or Aristides, the leader in talent and truth, is to be next to the Divinity."

May I be forgiven for wishing to add to this early Nineteenth Century English estimate of the Father of his Country—even at the cost of seeming intrusive—a later one, purely American. Forty years after Byron's lines were written, an occupant of Washington's chair, no less than Abraham Lincoln, said:

> "On that name no eulogy is expected here. It cannot be. To add brightness to the sun, or glory to the name of Washington, is alike impossible. Let none attempt it. In solemn awe pronounce the name, and in its naked, deathless splendour leave it shining on."

When you consider the nature of England, and indeed when you consider the history of the Nineteenth Century, the reason why Lord Byron's work and fame seem now less vital than they were becomes plain enough. He was perpetually in revolt. His work is the literature of revolt, and for the most part of unwise and unsuccessful revolt. It was revolt against Society; revolt against those features of morality on which Society sets up the most exacting standards; revolt against his order; revolt against Theology if not

against religion; and finally, revolt against many established opinions, most established institutions, and against some established governments. Still his Revolutions were all failures. They were either too late or too early —one or two may have been magnificent, but they were not war. Rousseau did inspire a revolution; Byron spent much of his time glorifying the disdain, the revenge, and the despair of baffled conspirators. And between the disdain and the despair which were the favourite emotions of his heroes, depicted again and again until they became monotonous, he rarely failed to introduce the debauchery. The admirable critic who still lends such scholarly dignity to your present Government pronounced a kind verdict in declaring him "the favourite poet of all the most high-minded conspirators and socialists of Continental Europe for half a century."

Yet even in his worst moments of utter perversity, when eager to maintain his affected pose as the most startlingly, sensationally, picturesquely wicked of Englishmen, he

passed in an instant to strains of surpassing sweetness when he thought of his daughter or his sister—to pictures of feminine charm and purity and grace which neither English literature nor the classics of the world can ever afford to lose from their immortal treasures. Who does not know and sympathise with the exclamation of the idolatrous parent?

> Is thy face like thy mother's, my fair child,
> Ada, sole daughter of my house and heart?
> When last I saw thy young blue eyes, they smiled,
> And then we parted—

Or who can fail to cherish that parent-poet's picture of the hapless Bride of Abydos?

> Soft as the memory of buried love;
> Pure as the prayer which Childhood wafts above;
> Such was Zuleika, such around her shone
> The nameless charms, unmarked by her alone—
> The light of love, the purity of Grace,
> The mind, the music breathing from her face,
> The heart whose softness harmonized the whole,
> And oh! that eye was in itself a soul.

Or who would not envy the Giaour the memory he recalled in his last confession?

> She was a form of life and light,
> That seen, became a part of sight;
> And rose, where'er I turned mine eye,
> The Morning-star of Memory.

> Yes, love indeed is life from heaven,
> A spark of that immortal fire,
> With Angels shared, by Allah given
> To lift from earth our low desire.

Or who does not love recalling again and again this dream from the Hebrew Melodies?

> She walks in beauty, like the night
> Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
> And all that's best of dark and bright
> Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
> . . . .
> The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
> But tell of days in goodness spent,
> A mind at peace with all below,
> A heart whose love is innocent.

But when you consider England again, or indeed when you consider human nature within the range of modern civilization, you see why even exquisite passages like these, which without a doubt fairly revealed one side of the poet's nature, failed when the first storm arose—perhaps still fail to earn general forgiveness for Lord Byron. He addressed his greatest poem to his fair child, sole daughter of his house and heart; but could not finish even that without another attack upon her Mother, or the boast that

> . . . . a far hour shall wreak
> The deep, prophetic fullness of this verse
> And pile on human hearts the mountain of my curse.

He put in the same poem a tender and not unnatural address to his sister, with a longing for her companionship. He even addressed its earlier cantos, in pure and graceful lines, to a child of eleven, the daughter of a distinguished friend. And yet, in this noblest of his works, the high-water mark of his better powers, consecrated thus in the eyes of the world to his daughter, his sister, and the child of his friend, he could not forego soiling with an occasional licentious touch, the stately and splendid display of a poetical genius hardly equalled in the century.

The depths to which he fell, in some of his poems of the Venetian period, reveal with painful frankness the other side of his amazing literary character. Perhaps it is well enough depicted in his own lines about Manfred:

> This should have been a noble creature ; he
> Hath all the energy which would have made
> A goodly frame of glorious elements,
> Had they been wisely mingled ; as it is,
> It is an awful chaos—light and darkness,
> And mind and dust, and passions and pure thoughts,
> Mixed and contending, without end or order.

I shall not discuss the worst of his works.

They were never really popular with people whose approval he would have seriously valued; but they were enormously read at the time. They have long since ceased to enjoy even that lowest tribute which misdirected genius sometimes shares with the vulgar output of the gutters. Still, even yet they ought not to be introduced to your Collegians save with the same warning Lady Caroline Lamb is said to have written about their author after her first meeting; they are "mad, bad and dangerous to know." But they cannot be quite dismissed, even with that apt summary. They are also witty to a degree; full of sparkle and of abandon, extraordinary in their quick changes of mood, tone, subject and place; crowded with epigrams and stinging with personal allusions. They seem bent on putting the worst construction on everything and everybody, and then on finding the whole sorry picture—treachery, betrayal, hypocrisy or shameless vice—an equal matter for unrestrained amusement. They try to prove nearly everybody as bad as he constantly

paints himself; and specially to seek consolation for his own matrimonial infelicity by considering marriage as a rule unhappy, most wives wanton, and all men false. Their attacks on well-known personages outrage most limitations that gentlemen are expected to recognize; yet these seem made, sometimes perhaps for revenge, but more often for the mere fun of showing how outrageous he can be, or of annoying his family, members of his order and former friends by exhibiting himself as the most unscrupulous madcap that ever put a splendid brain to such uses. Then again come flashes of magnanimous praise for old foes like Jeffrey; and, more striking still, the warmest and most grateful returns to every patient soul that still showed him appreciation or kindness in spite of his excesses. For the one extreme, you will remember his frequent tone towards Southey and Wordsworth; for the other, his sincere and obviously heartfelt tributes to Sir Walter Scott, to Thomas Moore, to Hobhouse, and especially to Goethe.

Even at the worst, he would suddenly pass

from wearisome pages of mere degradation of his powers to a lyric that will set the pulses of all men throbbing while brave deeds are honoured or liberty is loved. Take these disconnected lines from one that still shines in its base surroundings—a gem, in fact, that on the stretched forefinger of all Time sparkles forever:

> The mountains look on Marathon,
> And Marathon looks on the sea;
> And, musing there an hour alone,
> I dreamed that Greece might still be free.
>
> Must we but weep o'er days more blest?
> Must we but blush? Our fathers bled.
> Earth! render back from out thy breast
> A remnant of our Spartan dead!
> Of the three hundred grant but three,
> To make a new Thermopylae!
>
> Place me on Sunium's marble steep,
> Where nothing save the waves and I
> May hear our mutual murmurs sweep;
> There, swan-like, let me sing and die;
> A land of slaves shall ne'er be mine—
> Dash down yon cup of Samian wine!

There has been some misdirected sympathy wasted on the beginning of Lord Byron's career. "The Hours of Idleness" was a thin production, even for a clever lad of only eighteen; and the stilted preface, with

its exaggerated emphasis on his youth, and its high-stepping parade of his ancestors and his noble blood, contrasts absurdly enough with his own real feelings in his black moods, on the same subject. The *Edinburgh Review* might easily have ignored this first publication. But the game was too tempting, and the *Review* really gave it only what it deserved. But it also gave the confident and audacious young man his opportunity, and taught him his strength. The retort in "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" was obviously modelled on Pope. It did not equal that original, but for the occasion and for the youth it was singularly and most unexpectedly effective; and, from the day of its publication, Lord Byron had literary immortality absolutely in his own hands. Three years later (when he was still only twenty-four) the first part of the poem on which his better fame rests was published, and six years after that came its matchless climax. In the same interval appeared most of the other works by which his admirers

prefer to remember him, though one of the greatest was three years later still.

By then it had been burnt into his consciousness that he had "squandered his whole summer while it still was May;" and with some tremendous effort, after the worst of the work in Venice and the perverse publication of so much of it which his friends resisted and deplored, he summoned up all his powers, and gave to the world in that memorable year of 1821 (the thirty-third of his age, and practically the last of his valuable literary productivity) one poem at least, "Cain," which in sheer power and majesty has not been surpassed since Milton. Sir Walter Scott even declared that "Byron had matched Milton on his own ground." But the circumstances hardly permitted this to be an impartial verdict. If there were not other reasons for demur, it would be enough to consider the sad sincerity of the great Puritan, and the frivolous affectations of the poet of the Regency. The one in profound faith touched the noblest notes in the poetic diapason with the

exalted fervour belonging to his theme. The other seemed to have no faith, in God, or man, or woman, or in himself. He put into the mouth of our first Mother as fearful a curse upon the first murderer as ever chilled human veins:

> May the grass wither from thy feet! the woods
> Deny thee shelter! earth a home! the dust
> A grave! the sun his light! and heaven her God!

And, then, in forwarding it to his publishers, described it in this flippant way: "There's as pretty a piece of imprecation for you, when joined to the lines already sent, as you may wish to meet with in the course of your business. But don't forget the addition of these three lines, which are clinchers to Eve's speech." Imagine John Milton sending Satan's speech in "Paradise Lost" to *his* publishers with such a message! As little was he like our other and earlier literary divinity, Shakespeare. That unchallenged master knew all moods, all heights and depths of the human mind. Byron really knew to the bottom only the extravagantly loving or the defiant and revengeful ones. His heroes were generally haughty or cruel,

wicked and false. He fancied himself full of the noblest aspirations, but in Morley's own phrase, "the higher part of him was constantly dragged down by the degrading reminiscences of the brutishness of his youth." Perhaps it might be as truthfully and more plainly put by saying that he was a creature magnificently endowed in intellect, with many noble instincts, but without a moral nature.

All that prodigious talent could do, Byron did. If only sincerity and some honest manly belief in anything could have been added, that long, gloomy list of astonishing achievements, "Cain," "Manfred," "The Corsair," "Lara," "Mazeppa," "Marino Faliero," would have been lifted to another level, and some of them might, perhaps, have approached "matching Milton on his own ground." As it is, the comparison seems almost like sacrilege. Lofty as is the tone of "Cain," majestic as are many of its isolated passages, the reader ends its perusal with a feeling that it has been all vague and monstrous, that it leads nowhere, and that it has dragged up again the awful, bewildering

problem of the existence of evil in the world, only to make it appear more appalling than ever—offering about it mere negations and complaint, without one ray of illuminating light. "Manfred" is often as majestic, but more unsatisfying, and it keeps you wondering how far he deliberately wishes to have the reader at every turn reminded of himself. In this respect the "Corsair" and "Lara," with all their splendour, breathe throughout the same perplexity.

"Cain" was no doubt the fierce revolt which the stern Scotch theology he was taught in his youth wrought on such a rebellious and defiant nature. An elderly gentleman, living among you till within a week or two, cherished recollections of talk some years ago with a lady, much his senior, who often told of having seen the young Byron limping down Fletcher Gate on Sunday mornings, on his way to the High Pavement Chapel. The grandfather of a present City Solicitor is another, I am told, who handed on this significant fact in the poet's earliest residence

in Nottingham. Now this High Pavement Chapel was originally Presbyterian, though later, according to Coleridge, who preached in it in 1796, it comprised Unitarians, Arians and Trinitarians. Byron found there a Presbyterian form of church government, united with great freedom of thought on religious matters. But the creed imposed upon the impressionable child in the Scotch Presbyterian church at Aberdeen is the creed against which the whole mad, despairing but sublime "Mystery" of "Cain" is levelled, and to which so many wild outbursts in his other works are to be referred.

His youthful life here was marked, according to local tradition, by two other interesting facts. He was tortured by a quack in ignorant efforts to cure his lameness; and taught by an American refugee, from whom he may have imbibed other revolutionary ideas besides his estimate of Washington. He held this tutor long after, at any rate, in the grateful memory which he was apt to keep for all who ever rendered him a kindness.

In most of Byron's poems that naturally classify themselves in gloom and power with "Cain," one figure constantly recurs. Sometimes

> There was a laughing Devil in his sneer,
> That raised emotions both of rage and fear;
> And where his frown of hatred darkly fell,
> Hope, withering fled, and Mercy sigh'd farewell!

At other times this figure was depicted merely as

> Lord of himself—that heritage of woe,
> That fearful empire which the human breast
> But holds, to rob the heart within of rest.

Then again the figure soliloquized:

> . . . . I have done men good,
> And I have met with good, even among men—
> But this avail'd not: I have had my foes,
> And none have baffled, many have fallen before me—
> But this avail'd not: Good or evil, life,
> Powers, passions, all I see in other beings,
> Have been to me as rain unto the sands,
> Since that all nameless hour.

Here is the most joyous strain in this strange figure's whole wild creed:

> . . . if we do but watch the hour,
> There never yet was human power
> Which could evade, if unforgiven,
> The patient search and vigil long
> Of him who treasures up a wrong.

And here was a fact that seemed to give him comfort:

> He knew himself detested, but he knew
> The hearts that loath'd him crouched and dreaded too.
> Lone, wild and strange, he stood alike exempt
> From all affection and from all contempt.

When one recurs often to the many passages like these, and then to his equally frequent allusions to the perversity of the British public in identifying the author with his creations, one would be led, even now, merely on internal evidence, to suspect that such an identification was probably what he desired. There need surely be no wonder that when his works were pouring from the press, this idea was nearly universal. He frankly abandoned the effort at distinguishing between "Childe Harold" and himself in the preface to the last canto; and it would puzzle some people to interpret the comment in his Journal on the story Hobhouse brought that he was his own hero in the "Corsair," and had actually been concerned himself in piratical ventures, except on the theory that in a moment of bad swagger he really wanted to put about also that gross report.

And yet, in frequent and more natural moods, this would-be misanthrope was really one of the warmest-hearted of men. In his defence of your strikers here, he hit upon a phrase inspired with the same nobility which marked Burke's declaration that you cannot frame an indictment against a whole nation. "Can you commit," exclaimed the Nottingham peer, "can you commit a whole County to their own prisons?" When he heard, years after, that a poor Italian was condemned to the stake "for having stolen a wafer-box out of a church," he records that "Shelley and I are of course up in arms against this piece of piety." His continental influence fanned the revolutionary flame against the family, against religion, against property; but he really had, himself, no deep-seated wish to overthrow either—least of all the last. He simply had not thought it out. Unlike Rousseau, he did not realise whither his wild talk tended. When a bereaved husband sent him a copy of a written prayer for Lord Byron, found among his wife's

papers, instead of being enraged at the intrusion and the offence to his supposed creed, the poet wrote that he had read the prayer for himself with all the pleasure that can arise from so melancholy a topic; that in the course of reading the story of mankind he never met with anything so unostentatiously beautiful; and that he "would not exchange the prayer of the deceased in his behalf for the united glory of Homer, Cæsar and Napoleon, could such be accumulated upon a living head." He closed his singularly tender letter of acknowledgment to his bereaved clerical correspondent with an appeal to be thought capable of knowing and approving the better course, however much the tendency to follow the worse one might have been applied to his conduct.

Byron's fame would be better founded, if it did not rest on so many works. Here, too, he approved the better course, but held to the worse. In a letter to his publisher he deliberately laid down the proposition that a

good long poem was impossible—he, the author of one poem in sixteen cantos, of three poems of high importance in one year, of two in another, and of six in the last year of his really valuable literary activity. Murray had written that half of the third and fourth cantos of a certain work was very good, "You are wrong," was Lord Byron's answer, "for if it were it would be the finest poem in existence. Where is the poetry of which one half is good? Is it the Æneid? Is it Milton's? Is it Dryden's? Is it anyone's except Pope's and Goldsmith's, of which all is good? If one half be good, what would you have more? No—no; *no* poetry is *generally* good—only by fits and starts—and you are lucky to get a sparkle here and there. You might as well want a midnight all stars as rhyme all perfect." It must be admitted that, in spite of his genius, his practice sometimes conformed to his theory!

A quarter of a century later, and on another continent, another man of irregular genius and lamentable life advanced substantially

the same idea. "I hold," said Edgar Allan Poe, "that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, 'a long poem,' is simply a flat contradiction in terms . . . I would define in brief the poetry of words as 'The rhythmical creation of beauty.' Its sole arbiter is taste. With the intellect or with the conscience it has only collateral relations, and unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with duty or with truth."

With one part of this ghastly creed, Byron sometimes appeared in accord. His pen did at such times seem to have no concern whatever either with duty or with truth. He abandoned his country and the public duty to which he was born, as well as his circle of private duties. He prefaced the first canto of "Childe Harold" with a French extract to the effect that "I hated my country. All the impertinences of divers peoples among whom I have lived have reconciled me to it." He could even picture his native land to foreign eyes as—

> . . . of those true sons the Mother,
> Who butchered half the earth and bullied t'other.

And still there was no approval he so hungered for as that of his old circle and his native land. From the superb opening of the fourth canto in "Childe Harold," the vision of "Venice sitting in state, throned on her hundred isles," he turned almost at once, as so often before, to his personal griefs, but with this significant admission :

> I twine
> My hopes of being remembered in my line
> With my land's language.

He even came again to boast of his English birthright ; and his dreams almost seemed to turn to Westminster Abbey as his final home :

> Yet was I born where men are proud to be,
> Not without cause ; and should I leave behind
> The inviolate island of the sage and free,
> And seek me out a home by a remoter sea,
> Perhaps I loved it well ; and should I lay
> My ashes in a soil which is not mine,
> My spirit shall resume it—if we may
> Unbodied choose a sanctuary . . . .
> If my fame should be, as my fortunes are,
> Of hasty growth and blight, and dull Oblivion bar
> My name from out the temple where the dead
> Are honour'd by the nations—let it be—
> And light the laurels on a loftier head!

Byron's real inspiration was apt to be personal or political rather than poetic ; and

also apt to be invoked by some revolt against existing order. It is pitiful to note how much even of his finest verse is occupied with his family troubles and personal griefs; with his firm determination to bear them in silence, and with the melodious volubility in which he continues, just the same, to pour them forth—meanwhile revelling in ridicule of the conventions which he defies. In politics his very first appearance in the House of Lords was in a generous and humane appeal for men here in his own County, engaged in a lawless strike which no one would now justify, against the use of machinery in your Nottingham industries. The earliest effect of his travel was discontent with his country's course in Portugal. Then came hostility to the established order in Italy, dissatisfaction with government in Spain, hostility to Turkey and to Austria, and a resolute effort to arouse the Greeks to resistance. In short, to use the language in which he thought to describe his own principles,

> . . . . plain, sworn, downright detestation
> Of every despotism in every nation,

flamed out at every opportunity throughout his work. His sympathies with Ireland led him into wild outbursts against Castlereagh. With Greece they carried him sometimes into bitter attacks on Lord Elgin, for the crime of bringing the Elgin marbles to the British Museum; oftener into stinging reproaches to the Greeks themselves; or into inspiring confidence like this:

> For Freedom's battle, once begun,
> Bequeathed by bleeding Sire to Son,
> Though baffled oft, is ever won.
> Bear witness, Greece, thy living page!
> Attest it many a deathless age!

or again, into enduring laments like this:

> A thousand years scarce serve to form a State;
> An hour may lay it in the dust; and when
> Can man its shattered splendour renovate,
> Recall its virtues back, and vanquish Time and Fate?
> And yet how lovely in thine age of woe,
> Land of lost gods and godlike men, art thou!

But Greece was always the object for which he kindled quickest. Many of his finest passages throb with enthusiasm for her history and her art; with love and hope for the land itself. He sustained the cause of Modern Greece with his fortune as well as his genius

and his fame; and at last laid down his life in a wild but nobly disinterested and generous effort in her service.

I have ventured to speak of "Childe Harold" as the high-water mark of his genius. We should lose much if no other work of Byron's were preserved, but his fame might rest securely on that alone. In its splendid close Italy was largely its field, and a hundred Italian gems in it will occur to every student of the poet—the wonderful picture of Venice with which it opens; the apostrophe to "Rome, my country! city of the soul"; the exquisite descriptions of natural scenery, as of Clitumnus, or of art, as of St. Peter's, or of the Venus de Medici, "drunk with beauty"; the reflections on the Imperial Mount:

> Admire, exult, despise, laugh, weep—for here
> There is such matter for all feeling;—Man!
> Thou pendulum betwixt a smile and tear,
> Ages and realms are crowded in this span.

The lot of Venice is whimsically described as shameful to the nations, most of all to Albion:

> . . . . the Ocean Queen should not
> Abandon Ocean's children; in the fall
> Of Venice think of thine, despite thy watery wall.

He hated Austria on account of her rule of Venice; though Venice in her day was no less arbitrary. But he lived there, and this, like nearly all his pet national and other aversions, was purely personal and illogical. He scorned Florence's rich tombs of merchant Dukes, while she was still without the tomb of Dante; and went into a droll fury with all French poetry, because a great French poet wrote one depreciating line about Tasso:

> And Boileau, whose rash envy could allow
> No strain which shamed *his* country's creaking lyre,
> That whetstone of the teeth—monotony in wire!

He made a charming reference to Marceau, who was Freedom's champion, and had kept the whiteness of his soul, so men o'er him wept, and his mourners were two hosts, his friends and foes. He could praise Voltaire too, whose wit, like the wind, "blew where it listed, laying all things prone,—now to o'er throw a fool, and now to shake a throne." But it enraged him that Napoleon should be compared to Cæsar—"a bastard Cæsar," he exclaimed. He felt constrained to add that Cæsar himself was "justly slain"; but followed

with more denunciation of Napoleon's reign of blood, with the sudden burst, "Renew Thy rainbow, God," and the demand, "Can tyrants but by tyrants conquered be?" Hatred of anything he thought tyranny, generous if undiscriminating sympathy with the oppressed, shine, in fact, on every page. But enough. Let me only add that a fitting climax to the great poem comes in the unmatched passage beginning

> Oh! that the Desert were my dwelling place,

and ending with the apostrophe to the Ocean, of which it is not too much to say that no more splendid addition to English verse has been made, from Byron's day to this.

The wild, often unreasoning love of liberty which pulsates throughout his work, and was consecrated in his death; and the enormous spiritual force which this love of liberty and his genius gave him throughout Europe, made him a Social Solvent, rather than a Regenerator of Society; a Solvent of stifling precedents and of arbitrary rule,

rather than an Emancipator. Wherever his prodigious influence in that seething time extended, he unsettled things, but they have been the better since for his activities. He helped start tendencies then which, under wiser guidance, before the end of the century, had changed the face of Great Britain and of Europe.

Well, Your Grace, you have at any rate chosen a great name, and your own, for your new Chair of English Literature. If the young men your Professors teach from it are lifted at all to the heights which Byron trod with ease, there will be here a new birth of letters and a new inspiration for the high cause of human rights all round the world. You will surely be careful that these young men are not lured to the nether depths in which he also so often dwelt, by the baleful lights—corpse-lights, indeed—which gleam from the worst of his verse. You will not gild his amazing egotism. You will not bid pupils admire his incessant iteration of his private griefs and thirst for revenge; nor will you

let his intrusion of these and other unseemly subjects upon the world be longer bathed in the glamour which the taste and morals of the Regency permitted to hover about his perfect features and romantic story. You will not commend his studied pose as a disdainful martyr, or his theatrical display of his injuries, his misery, the evil he has done and the pardon he has granted to those he wronged.

But when all this sparkling froth and dull noisome sediment has been rejected, you will still be able to hold up for admiration and instruction a body of noble English verse, hardly surpassed, perhaps hardly equalled in the whole century whose dawn he illuminated. It is verse, too, wherein the pretence utterly disappears that it must be without relation to truth or duty, for it breathes the wider, more humane truths to which the world began growing up through the Nineteenth Century; it is a bugle call to duty, and its strong, lasting note is Liberty.

> Yet, Freedom! yet thy banner, torn, but flying,
> Streams like the thunder-storm *against* the wind;

> Thy trumpet voice, though broken now and dying,
> The loudest still the tempest leaves behind:
> Thy tree hath lost its blossoms, and the rind,
> Chopp'd by the axe, looks rough and little worth,
> But the sap lasts,—and still the seed we find
> Sown deep even in the bosom of the North;
> So shall a better spring less bitter fruit bring forth.

That spring has come; his anticipations have been more than realised. He builded better than he knew when he set the solvent power of his verse to weakening old conventions and so much of the old political and social order. If we cannot credit him with seeking or foreseeing the real results, we must credit him at any rate with a brilliant share in making them possible. And so it comes that the honour the Professor in your new Chair may justly ascribe to your illustrious son for whom it is named—the pride and gratitude that you in Nottingham may justly feel for him, will be heightened when you consider the difference in the condition of the Empire, the widening of the bounds of ordered liberty under law, the difference in English rights and privileges, in the English Court and in the fountain of

Honour, in your well-being at home and in your standing abroad—the enormous difference between the periods of George the Fourth and George the Fifth.

APPENDIX.

PROCEEDINGS AT THE ALBERT HALL, NOTTINGHAM.

From the *Nottingham Guardian*, November 30th, 1910.

There was a brilliant and representative gathering in the Nottingham Albert Hall last evening, when, with a view to the foundation of a Byron Memorial Chair of English Literature at the Nottingham University College, an address on Byron was given by the American Ambassador, the Hon. Whitelaw Reid.

The Duke of Portland presided, and there were also on the platform, in addition to Mr. Whitelaw Reid, the Bishop of Southwell, Bishop Hamilton Baynes, the Sheriff (Councillor F. N. Hobson), Sir Joseph Bright (chairman of the University College Council), the Town Clerk (Mr. J. A. H. Green), Councillor C. Foulds, the Rev. Hugo Heynes, and Captain Nugent. Apologies for unavoidable absence were received from the Mayor (Sir Edward Fraser), Earl Manvers, Viscount Galway, Sir Francis Ley, Sir Thos. Birkin, Bishop Brindle, the head master of Repton, Mr. W. G. Player, the six candidates in the election, and others.

A guard of honour, consisting of the University College contingent of the Officers' Training Corps saluted the distinguished visitor on arrival, and conspicuous on the front of the platform were the British and American flags inter-looped.

The Duke of Portland said that for some time past it had been the very laudable desire of those who were responsible for the management of the Nottingham College to increase its efficiency and its status by every means in their power, and to do so it seemed desirable to enlarge the scope of its work. To bring this about it appeared advisable to create a new chair of learning to be devoted to the study of literature. That day they were assembled to take the first steps towards the founding of this chair, and in its aid they looked forward to a very intellectual treat in the shape of a lecture on the great poet Byron and his works from the eloquent lips and the cultivated, graceful, and fertile brain of their distinguished guest, Mr. Whitelaw Reid, the American Ambassador. They most heartily welcomed his Excellency to their midst, and they felt greatly honoured that for the second time within a very short period he had thought fit to visit the city. It was exceedingly kind of Mr. Whitelaw Reid to come to the vicinity of Newstead, to Byron's own county, to give his assistance, though he was—as were happily the people in general of the great Republic which he so ably represented—in deep sympathy with every

well-considered and moderate movement which made for progress and the advancement of mankind. He knew that his Excellency looked upon his theme in a pleasant light, for when the speaker had the pleasure of conveying the invitation to him to lecture on Byron he said: "The idea is certainly very attractive, but by no means to be lightly undertaken. Byron's life, character, and work are of such a complex kind, they require great care to fairly delineate." But, however attractive in itself Mr. Whitelaw Reid may have found his self-imposed task, he was sure they were none the less grateful to him for his presence and for the trouble he had taken on their behalf. (Applause.)

At the close of the Ambassador's address, Sir Joseph Bright, in proposing a vote of thanks to his Excellency, said that to endow the chair well a sum of from £10,000 to £15,000 was required, and he was exceedingly pleased to be able to report that several substantial sums had been received towards that object. With the generosity of the citizens of Nottingham he did not hesitate to say that within a comparatively short space of time the object would be accomplished. But that effort was only an instalment or part of what they desired to achieve. The time was not quite opportune now, but they hoped before long that a large effort would be made to obtain a full University in their midst—(applause)—a University for the city, the county, and the North Midland district. They might have a chair of Divinity, a chair of Hebrew, a chair of Philosophy, and others, which would all count when they made an application for a full charter. After referring to the late King's great interest in University work, he suggested that a King Edward University in Nottingham would be a fitting memorial to the late Monarch. Its name would indicate that it was not merely to fulfil local aims. They welcomed the presence that night of distinguished teachers from Leicester, Derby, Newark, Mansfield, and other places, and they wanted to get people in the district generally to take an interest in the movement.

The Bishop of Southwell seconded. He said that they had enjoyed that night the presence of one of the most distinguished and best known of Ambassadors, one who came with a brilliant career behind him from a great nation, the heart of which never beat without rousing emotion in this country. He had come in a week when literature was very plentiful and there was language of many kinds. (Laughter.) It was addresses such as that which helped them to understand many-sided characters, and it would be a blessing to Nottingham and the district if the chair was formed and if a University could be established which might help them to realise the greatness which came within the reach of those who would study and use their intellect as God would have them to use it.

The resolution was carried with much enthusiasm, and in acknowledgment Mr. Whitelaw Reid said that never in his six years' residence in England had he failed to meet with the utmost cordiality and goodwill, and never had he been taught to feel that the representative of his country was not made really at home everywhere among the people of the country to which he was accredited.

Replying to a vote of thanks for presiding, which had been proposed by Councillor Foulds, and seconded by the Town Clerk,

The Duke of Portland humorously observed that when the prophesied millennium arrived, perhaps they would no longer require the services of the class to which he was supposed to belong, but until then he should always do whatever he could not only to further the most excellent scheme which they had met to support, but everything else which was likely to be of benefit to his friends and neighbours in the county. He hoped for a favourable result from the meeting, and from the depth of his heart he appealed to everybody in the city and county who was able to do so to liberally subscribe and help forward the new chair of Literature.

The meeting closed with the National Anthem, and cheers for King George and the American Republic.

THE LIBRARY

THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Santa Barbara

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW.